II. *Basket-work.*

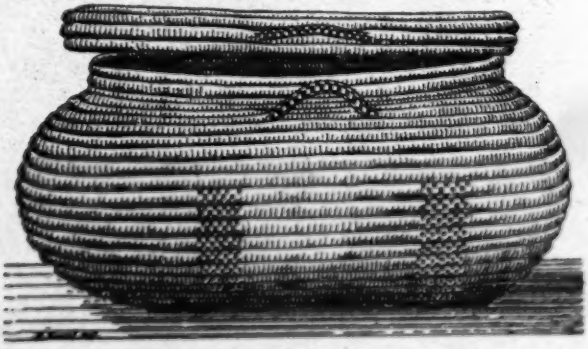
The milala palm, whose sap supplies the tipplers of Pessene with 137
their famous busura (II. p. 42), is a very valuable tree to the 285
Ba-Ronga, as it is of its leaves that the greater part of the baskets in use by this tribe are made. The basket-maker gathers the most perfect leaves. These are not like the mimale folioles, growing opposite one another on a central nerve. The *milala* (plur. of nala) are true palms, the leaves consisting of folioles from half an inch to an inch in width radiating from a common centre, which itself grows on the end of a long peduncle.

These trees are found in the woods of Mabota, Nondwane, Tembe, on the Coast, and in the low plains of the North Eastern Zoutpansberg, etc., sometimes in large numbers. Returning 285
home, the workman (here we employ the masculine, basket-making being essentially man's work) spreads out the leaves in the sun to dry, having previously straightened the folioles somewhat, separating (hangela) them one from the other ; when they dry, they turn a light grey colour with a shining polished surface, and are then hung up in the hut where they will be sheltered from the dew and ready for use. When the work is to be started, the folioles are torn (phatlula) from their peduncle, and, with a sharp pointed instrument, are split longitudinally into strips or straws of 1/8 or 2/8 of an inch wide, the ribs of the leaves (nhlamalala, yin-tin) being carefully kept ; these delicate wands have their special use.

The Ronga basket makers are very fond of decorating their 285
baskets with *designs in black*. These triangular and square 531
patterns are produced by artistically plaiting dark and light 386
coloured straws, and are not painted on after the baskets are manufactured. The straw is dyed black in the following manner : it is soaked in the black ooze (ntjhaka) of the marshes for two weeks, and then laid out to dry, which gives it a reddish-brownish colour. This hue is deepened by a second treatment. The leaves of a shrub called *mpsabutimu* are gathered and placed in a

pot with the red brown milala in alternate layers, until the utensil is full : water is then poured over them and the whole put on to boil ; very soon the straw becomes a brilliant black. The basket-maker has now only to pull up some of the grass growing in the hollow near the lake, dry it, and he is ready to commence work.

In the accompanying plates illustrations will be found of the principal specimens of this art, stereotyped shapes which have passed on from generation to generation, doubtless from



Ngula.

prehistoric times, and are called respectively : *ngula*, *huvama*, *shihundju*, *lihlelo* and *nhluto*.

The *ngula* (yin-tin) (p. 27) takes the place of honour, and is the most prized of all the Ronga baskets. It requires days or even weeks of continuous work to make one, but the result is worthy of the time and labour bestowed upon it ; I brought with me to Europe several *ngula* of various sizes. The particular one shown below, is oval and measures six feet two inches in circumference ; but there are many much larger, both spheroid and ovoid. This is how they make or, to use the technical Native term, "tlhaba" — "pierce" this basket. The workman takes his dried grass and plaits it, lengthening the plait according to requirements, as he goes along : this plait is bound round, and entirely hidden, by a special binding of palm leaf straw, thus forming a thickish cord of about half an inch in diameter ; the cord is soon doubled back upon itself, and forms a centre, around which

Bangela (making) for the *bṵnana*, a sort of hammock, made of plaited milala which is hung to the branches of the trees and sometimes in summer used for sleeping in, to escape the mosquitoes which swarm inside the huts. 285 513

Runga (sewing) for the boats (byatsho, dji-ma). The ancient Native boats built before the appearance of nails, hammers and saws, were made of pieces of wood securely tied together. Some of these antiquated craft are still to be seen on the Maputju river. 285 501 322

On the rivers up country, boats are frequently made of a large piece of curved bark, bent on both sides, which will hold two or three persons. I crossed the great Letaba in a boat of this description. Such boats are also used for storing water. Where mimale branches (or nervules) are procurable, they are tied together so as to form a raft called *shikhakhafu*. These are used on the Nkomati River, and on the lakes in Ronga territory. Big rafts made of trunks of trees fastened together, and called *magudhlwana*, were used in former times on the sea, when going to meet the White men, the Ba-Godji. (See later.) They are now no longer used and there is scarcely one to be found. In the neighbourhood of Lourenço Marques the Natives now build their boats on the European model. The fishermen cut down forked branches, which serve as ribs, to which they nail planks. They are wonderfully clever at this work ; one man, Sam Matlombe, nicknamed the "King of the Bay," was particularly expert at it. [177]

The sewn boats of olden times might well be included under the heading of basket-ware. Those of to-day belong definitely to another branch of industry, and will afford us a natural point of transition from basket work to wooden articles.

III. *Wood-carving.*

It is the *nkuhlu*, mafureira tree, Trichilia emetica, as we have already seen, that is used by the Natives of these parts for their wood-carving. If the name of this tree is very hard to pronounce, its wood is, to an equal degree, soft and possesses the great 322 531

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Thonga carvings.

(One seventh of the natural size.)

2: Junod M-5 (1895-1909) 1927 Thonga

advantage of not easily splitting or cracking when being dried. If Nature had not bestowed on the Thongas this excellent tree, who knows if they would have ever thought of executing the works of art which are depicted in the accompanying illustration!

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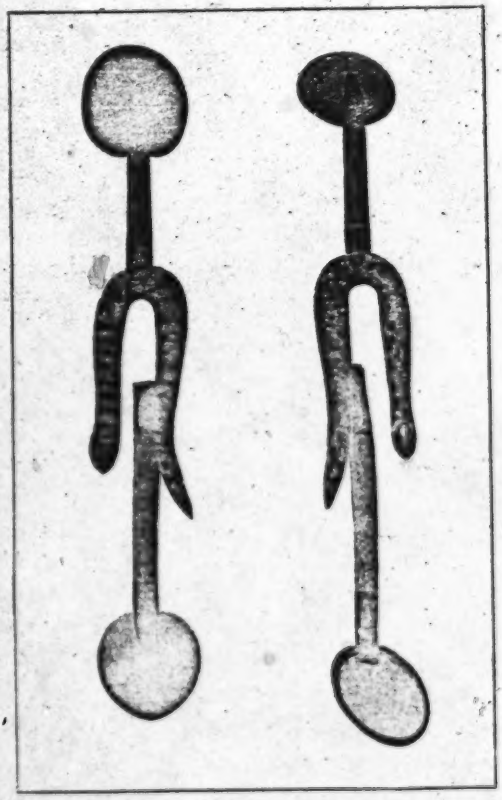

Carved spoon from Maputju country.

However before thinking of art, they began by cutting, or fashioning, with their small knives, articles of every day use: *spoons* (nkombe, mu mi) for instance, (see illustrations of carvings, No. 1), made in several sizes; the big one is used for serving out the potful of maize amongst the rightful claimants, and the small one for conveying food to the mouth when the hands are ritually soiled (I. p. 193). One often finds really well carved spoons. I give drawings of two which are particularly interesting; the first shows a sort of spiral, or catherine-wheel decoration at the top of the handle (No. 4); the other, brought by Dr. Audeoud from the Maputju country, has a carved snake as an ornamental motive. Spoons are all ornamented, even the plainest, with designs in black, burnt into the wood with a red-hot iron. For beer, ladles are used, made of a single piece of wood; these are generally decorated with large black triangles (No. 2). In Inhambane and Quelimane, the Natives make them of cocoa nut

shells, on which they carve curious geometrical figures (No. 5). 322
Goblets (ntcheko, mu-mi) are generally made with a handle. 531
(No. 6). 415

In the accompanying plate, (p. 131), two spoons are seen hanging to a *chain* made of links carved from nkuhlu wood. This is a wonderful product of Native art. These chains are often met with, especially in the Northern clans, some with links of six inches in length, the whole attaining to a length of many yards. The one here shown is six feet long, with links of only three inches. The special point to be noted in this "objet d'art" is that it has been carved from a single piece of wood and the artist had to make no mistake from the very beginning; a single slip of the knife would have broken the whole chain and made it useless. European joiners told me they doubted whether an ordinary workman would be able to carve such a chain. I was told that these spoon-chains were used by two individuals who wished to form an alliance; they passed the chain over their shoulders and, so united, ate from the same plate. This, however, is mere play and has no ritual value.

Between the two spoons, a kind of *bowl* is seen, almost perfectly round and prettily decorated. It was used by a man who had been possessed, and who washed his face in it every day to cool his head and appease the spirits. Thongas also carve large dishes, sometimes prettily decorated, though not so attractive as those of the Ba-Rotse of the Zambezi. I possess one of two feet in length by 10 inches in width. These are used for serving meat.

I must not forget the *mortars* (tshuri, dji-ma) usually made of mahogany, or of nkanye, and the pestles (musi, mu-mi) made of nkonono. The former are often adorned with triangular carvings.

The same style of decoration is to be seen on the *calabashes* which Natives use as bottles. The calabash, as every one knows, is a sort of gourd composed of two spheres of unequal size with a narrow connection between them. By an ingenious system of supports, placed under the gourd during its growth, Natives succeed in imparting to the upper sphere the shape of an elongated neck. There are many varieties of calabash, some small, furnished

with a long projection and used for drawing the bukanye from the large jars. They are specially kept for this purpose! (See p. 101, No. 7, and also I, p. 400). In Vol. I. p. 50, I have given an

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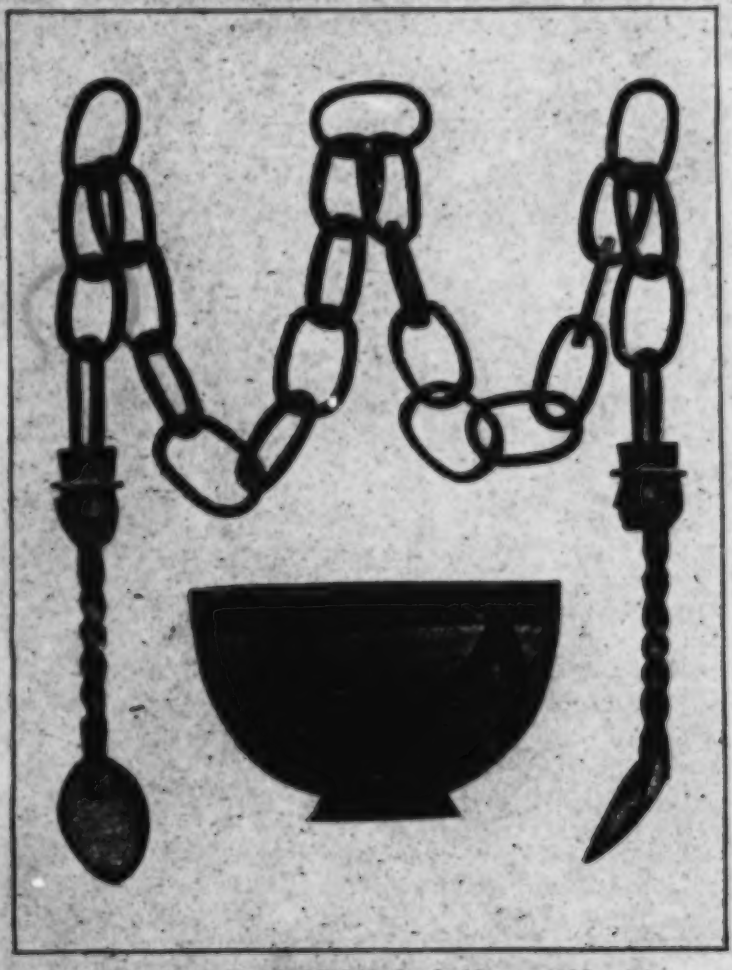

Carved chain and bowl, (Neighbourhood of Lourenço Marques).
(One fifth of the natural size.)

illustration of these bukanye calabashes, called *ntjeko* (mu-mi), very prettily decorated by a Tembe artist. The black designs are burnt in and represent huts, birds, palm trees and, last but not least, two warriors fighting! The white dots are beads inserted

in the soft bark of the calabash. The largest calabash on this plate measures 21 inches in length and 7 in width. 322 531

Some plainer calabashes are Nos. 8 and 9 of the illustration of ornaments. Others are simply shells of sala (shikutja), (p. 16), with a good-sized hole cut in them for an opening (Nos. 6 and 10); a circular piece, say one third the size of the other, makes a capital cover; a string passes through the bottom of the calabash and the middle of the cover, fastening the two together. When this is knotted on top of the latter the *lard tin* is securely closed. This kind of calabash is generally thus designated, for it is in these round balls that the mafureira grease is kept, to which I have previously referred (p. 18). They are hung up in the roof of the hut where they swing to and fro in the smoke and become well browned. The young folks amuse themselves by carving designs on these shells. 415

Mankhela's stick.

The artistic element is still more striking in the *snuff boxes* (ngulana, yin-tin), carved in ebony, which the chiefs are fond of carrying; the one depicted (p. 128, No. 9) came to me from Mavabaze who was, for a time, chief of the Khosa clan. It is also conspicuous in the strange *pillows* (shidamu) on which the Ba-Ronga rest their heads at night. Let us contemplate this article (No. 8) with the respect it deserves! It is probably on this description of pillow that primitive humanity in all parts of the world has dreamed its dreams! We see it sculptured on the Egyptian monuments, above or by the side of princely couches. We find also among the relics of the lake-dwellers stone objects of a similar shape, which were doubtless used for the same purpose. The Bantu has adhered to this piece of prehistoric furniture all through the ages. 276 532 322 352 322